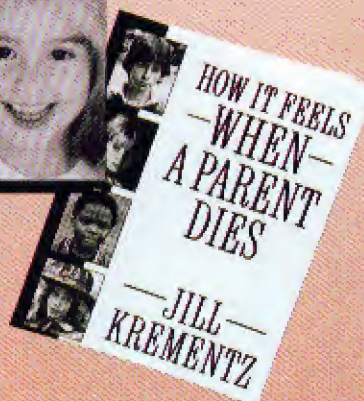


MEET

JILL KREMENTZ



Jill Krementz
with her daughter,
Lily Vonnegut

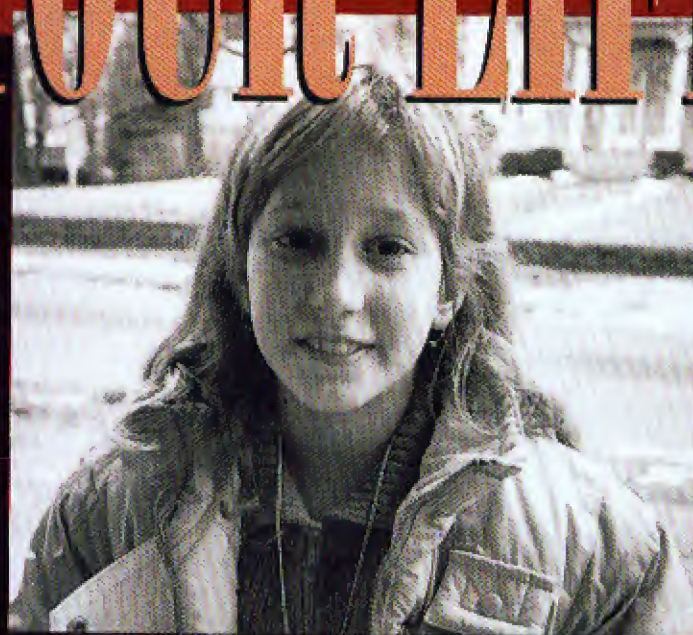


Several years ago, Jill Krementz attended the funeral of a friend. There, she spotted her friend's son, a boy of about eight, bravely holding back tears. But when Krementz spoke to him, he let loose a flood of feelings. One of the strongest was his feeling of being alone. "That's when I decided to write *How It Feels When a Parent Dies*," Krementz said. "I wanted kids who have experienced the death of a parent to know that they are not alone."

Since then, Krementz has written three more *How It Feels* books. In each, Krementz tells the children's stories in a writer's voice that sounds like the children's own. For *How It Feels to Fight for Your Life*, she interviewed children who were very ill. Although such a book could be terribly sad, this one isn't. Krementz's interviews bring out the children's hopes, their courage—and their fears.

Krementz has photographed and written children's books on many other topics. The books in her *Very Young* series, including the award-winning *A Very Young Dancer*, look at children working hard to succeed in various fields.

HOW IT FEELS TO
**FIGHT FOR
YOUR LIFE**



Rachel
DeMaster,
age ten

written and photographed
by Jill Krementz



**“LAST YEAR
I LEARNED
TO GIVE
MYSELF
INJECTIONS.”**

I was seven years old when my mom told me I had diabetes. It was a big shock because other than having to go to the bathroom more than usual I was feeling fine. I had gone to my doctor for a regular checkup and he found sugar in my urine. This was a sign that my pancreas wasn't working right.

When my mother explained to me what diabetes was I burst into tears. I was afraid I was going to die. Even after my parents convinced me that this wasn't going to happen, I felt that my life was going to change completely.

My pancreas is in my tummy and it produces insulin. Insulin helps the body to process sugar and turn it into energy. There are two kinds of diabetes, Type One and Type Two. In Type One the pancreas can't produce insulin at all. In Type Two there's nothing wrong with the pancreas but the cells in the rest of the body don't respond to the insulin. Type One used to be called juvenile onset diabetes because it occurred most frequently among kids, but now they've learned that grown-ups can also get Type One. I have Type One, which means that I have to get insulin shots.

I was really lucky that my pediatrician noticed a problem so quickly because we were able to start treatment right away. I was diagnosed in December and a couple of months later, when it was time for me to start taking insulin, I went to the hospital and stayed there for three days. I was in Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, which has one of the best diabetes programs anywhere. I wasn't sick

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when I went in—they just wanted to monitor my reaction to the insulin. It was also the best way for them to educate me and my parents. The doctors gave Mom and Dad a book to study and the diabetes team showed them how to take care of me.

While I was in the hospital, a nurse gave me my injections but they also started teaching my parents how to give me my insulin shots and blood tests. I have to have two shots of insulin every day, one when I get up in the morning and one about a half hour before I eat dinner.

I take two different kinds of insulin, a short-acting one and a long-acting one. The amount of each depends on the results of my blood test. I usually have the same amount of the long-acting one and different amounts of the short-acting one, but this also depends on the season and how much exercise I'm planning to get. Things like getting sick also change my insulin dose. For example, when I have the flu I have to take more because my blood sugar level shoots up.

The first time my mother gave me an insulin shot, I could tell she was really scared. We were both afraid it would hurt. After experimenting with a few different kinds of needles we found one that's so sharp it hardly hurts. Last year I learned to give myself injections. First, I practiced the whole technique on an old doll. In the beginning I was scared that it would hurt more if I did it. Now I'm scared it'll hurt more when my mother does it.

Some people use air guns without a needle for giving insulin. I've heard that the air pressure coming out of the gun hurts as much as getting a needle so I still take injections.

Insulin shots keep the amount of sugar in my blood at the right level but only on a temporary basis. That's why I have to give myself blood tests to make sure everything is okay. The blood test is more annoying than painful—just a tiny little finger prick. The first time I had to have one I was so scared I hid in my father's closet. I sat there behind his shoes and wouldn't come out. My parents talked to me for a while and finally I agreed to let them do the test. I was so nervous that I think I made it hurt more than it should have. Nowadays I'm so used to it that I can do it in the morning without even getting out of bed. I take turns with my fingers. I never use my thumbs or pinkies. I have callouses on my pointer fingers, middle fingers, and ring fingers because I've stuck myself so many times.

In the nurse's office at school I have a special machine that tests my blood for me. If I'm not feeling well I'll go and have a test. My teacher also checks to make sure that if I'm going to exercise I have some Life Savers or juice with me in case I have a low.

Lows happen when you overdo things that keep your blood sugar low, like taking too much insulin or getting too much exercise. When I get a

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low I feel shaky and dizzy and blah. Sometimes it gives me a slight headache, too. All I can do is sit. I don't have lows every day but there are days when I have two or three. Usually it depends on how much exercise I'm getting and how the day is going. Sometimes it's hard to distinguish between having a low and feeling crummy. I might go down to the nurse's office and take my blood test and find I'm not low at all.

If I'm having a low and don't do anything for it for a couple of minutes, it won't do any damage. But if I don't get some sugar into my system quickly it can be dangerous. I've never fainted during a low but that's because I always treat it in time. I wear a Medic Alert necklace that tells people I'm an insulin-dependent diabetic. It has phone numbers on it for them to call in case of an emergency. That way, if I'm somewhere alone and I have a problem, people who don't know what's wrong with me will be able to get me help immediately.

My brother, Neil, is great about helping me with my lows. When I'm feeling shaky he'll get me some food so I don't have to get up and move around. He knows that if it's not too bad I should have milk and crackers and that I should drink orange juice if the low is more serious.

For me, the worst part of having diabetes is not being able to eat whatever I want. Unless I'm having a low I can't eat any sugar except the natural type that's in fruit. The sugar that's in candy and cake makes my blood sugar level very high for a long time after I eat it. Once in a while, on

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WITH MY MOTHER
AND HELP HER
WITH THE
SHOPPING.”**



**“MY FAVORITE
EXERCISE IS JOGGING
WITH MY FATHER.”**



special occasions like my birthday, I have cake, but I'm basically not supposed to eat sweets. I feel bad when all my friends are eating candy and I can't have any. Neil is very considerate about not eating candy or cookies in front of me. He's older than I am and if he wants to eat sweets he usually waits until after I've gone to bed. There's one good thing about not eating sugar, which is that I don't have any cavities! My dentist is really proud of me.

On Halloween, my parents and I go trick or treating like everyone else, but since I can't eat the candy my parents buy it from me. They give me five cents for every piece of candy I get and I buy myself a stuffed animal. I have a great collection now. Neil used to eat all of my candy but since he got braces my parents have been buying his candy too.

I would have to say that I miss maple syrup the most of all the things I'm not allowed to eat. I go to the supermarket with my mother and help her with the shopping. We get stuff like diet soda and sugar-free hot chocolate so I don't miss sweet things too much. We spend a long time reading the labels on everything. It's amazing how many foods that don't taste sweet actually have sugar in them.

The worst thing about my diet is that I have to eat so much! Besides breakfast, lunch, and dinner, I have three snacks every day. People with diabetes have to eat a certain amount of carbohydrates and more protein than most people. This is a pain because I'm not a big eater and especially because I don't like protein. The morning snack we have at school is at just the right time for my first snack of the day. I always have milk and a carbohydrate. When I get home at three-thirty my mom

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gives me chips or crackers. I like Goldfish a lot because they come in lots of flavors. I'm allowed to eat ice cream because it doesn't have that much sugar and it has fat and protein to balance the sugar, so that's what I have for my evening snack. In the morning, after I get my insulin shot, my mother asks me what I want for breakfast. I usually say, "Pig's feet, please." But I end up eating mozzarella cheese or eggs with toast, fruit, and milk. For lunch, I like to have some peanut butter to take care of the protein. And for dinner I have to eat a protein, a starch, a vegetable, a fruit, and a glass of milk. Our family eats together and we all eat the same food.

I have to be extremely punctual about my meals and snacks so that the food can interact with the insulin properly. This means that my parents always make sure I have food and juice with me when we're on a trip in case we get stuck in traffic. I can never sleep late, even on weekends and holidays, because I have to have my blood tested and take my insulin the first thing in the morning. I also have to eat half an hour after my insulin shot.

Exercise is good for everybody but it's especially good for me. This is because if my blood sugar is high I can lower it by exercising instead of taking insulin. When I want to exercise, I tell my mother in advance and she gives me a smaller dose of insulin. I'm one of the most athletic girls in my class and I've won trophies for swimming and soccer. There are lots of famous athletes who have diabetes. The ones I know about are Bill Talbert and Ham Richardson, who are both great tennis

players. Curt Fraser plays hockey for the Minnesota North Stars. My favorite exercise is jogging with my father. We go to the park near our house and we have a great time together.

Besides my regular pediatrician, I see a special doctor for my diabetes every three months. Her name is Dr. Fredda Ginsberg and she's at Mount Sinai Hospital. People come from all over the world to see her because she's so good. She asks me how much I've been exercising and whether I've been having lots of lows. I also have to have some blood tests when I see her. She lets me take my own blood pressure, which is fun. Dr. Ginsberg is much more than my doctor. She's my friend. I made her a paperweight out of rocks and shells and I crocheted her a little triangle that she pinned on her wall.

Having diabetes hasn't changed my relationships with my friends. However, when I go to play at other people's houses, I usually don't stay for dinner. If I sleep over at a neighbor's house my mom will come over and give me my shot. One time I went to my friend's house and did all my shots myself. Mom gave me instructions about how much insulin I should take so it wasn't hard at all.

Sometimes my friends from school watch to see how I do my blood tests. My brother's friend Mike always covers his eyes and yells "Mommy!" when I stick myself. My friend Dana, who wants to be a scientist when he grows up, likes to keep track of my blood sugar level so that he can tell me how I'm doing.

**“Having
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I have only one friend with diabetes. Her name is Tory and she's nine years old. Dr. Ginsberg introduced us at the hospital and we go to each other's house. If Tory hadn't taken a blood test with me, I never would have thought she had diabetes. She seems very healthy and she doesn't talk about it very much. I don't like to talk about diabetes either but I do like to know all about it. My family subscribes to a magazine called *Forecast*, which has all the latest news about machines and shots and what's going on medically. The best thing about *Forecast* is the section called "Making Friends." You can write to other people with diabetes. It has separate sections for people of all different ages and there's one section called "Friendly People 12 and Under." I think it would be fun to have a pen pal.

I also think it would be fun to go away to a special sleep-away camp for kids with diabetes. I can't go this year because my parents say I'm not old enough but I hope I can next year.

Sometimes I wonder if when I grow up anyone will want to marry me because my children may have diabetes. I worry that it's hereditary because my grandfather had it. My mother told me that it wouldn't be a problem because when people are really in love, the relationship comes first. My brother says that I shouldn't even be thinking about marriage for another fifteen years. He's right! Besides, by then there may be a cure for diabetes. In the meantime, things are okay because no matter what happens, I'm still me.



**“... NO
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STILL ME.”**
